

Nicaragua, an Echo of the Bay Of Pigs

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By Tad Szulc

A WASHINGTON
pril 17 marks the nearly forgotten 25th anniversary of the invasion of the Bay of Pigs in Cuba — organized, financed and directed by the United States. That sorry enterprise provides an uncannily real analogy with President Reagan's latest efforts to arm the Nicaraguan contras in order finally to oust the Sandinistas. Congress might do well to ponder this analogy as it prepares to vote on President Reagan's request for \$100 million in new aid to the rebels.

There is, to begin with, an eerie similarity in the assumptions underlying United States involvement in Cuba 25 years ago and in Nicaragua today. There are also parallels in the sequence of policy making decisions that gradually linked United States geopolitical objectives, first with Cuba, now with Nicaragua.

In the case of Nicaragua, the White House began by asserting that the Sandinistas were threatening to spread the virus of Communism throughout Central America. A secret decision was made, apparently in the early days of the Reagan Administration, in the National Security Council to uproot Managua's Marxist-Leninist leadership. This was followed by the self-serving declaration that most Nicaraguans were determined to be rid of the Sandinistas and that all it would take to help them accomplish this would be clever paramilitary support provided by the Central Intelligence Agency.

In the case of Cuba, the National Security Council met on March 10, 1959, to discuss, in secret, ways to "bring another Government to power." This was barely two months after Fidel Castro swept into power with overwhelming national support for his social revolution.

On March 17, 1960, President Dwight D. Eisenhower approved "A Program of Covert Action Against the Castro Regime" because Fidel Castro was moving toward Communism and a stronger relationship with the Soviet Union. Meanwhile, his Administration had begun to develop a paramilitary force outside of Cuba for "future guerrilla action."

On Feb. 3, 1961, the Joint Chiefs of Staff approved a "Military Evaluation of the C.I.A. Paramilitary Plan — Cuba," but with the warning that "it is obvious that ultimate success will depend upon political factors,

i.e., a sizable popular uprising or substantial follow-on forces."

However, the C.I.A. misled President John F. Kennedy about the likelihood of an uprising after the landing of the Cuban exiles' brigade. Secretary of State Dean Rusk later told a Presidential board of inquiry "that the uprising was utterly essential to success."

No major uprising occurred in Cuba along with the landing, and not only because Mr. Castro had had the foresight to round up thousands of potential opponents. Even those who had become increasingly disenchanted with Mr. Castro refused to welcome what they suspected to be a United States-engineered return to the status quo of the Fulgencio Batista dictatorship — indeed, the invading forces included several Batista officers.

Let us now turn to the Nicaraguan rerun of the Bay of Pigs operations.

Obviously, the conditions are not identical. The Sandinista commandantes have been in power for nearly seven years, and, notwithstanding their generally appalling leadership they have managed to consolidate their police and political hold on the population. Bad as life is in Nicaragua, and repressive as the Government's internal policies may be, the masses have not rushed to join or support the contras after nearly four years of C.I.A. entreaties.

In other repressive societies, the people have risen against well-armed dictatorships — as in Poland with Solidarity, and in the Philippines — without C.I.A. manipulations. They

have had convincing reasons to rebel, and they have done so with clean hands. Clearly, this point entirely escapes President Reagan when he compares the contras with the Filipinos or real freedom fighters elsewhere in the world.

Despite its failures, the Nicaraguan revolution of 1979 has brought considerable social justice and care to Nicaragua's impoverished people. The United States cannot ignore this fact any more than it can ignore the strong nationalistic sentiments of the Nicaraguan people arising, in part, from earlier armed interventions by United States Marines.

Nor can it ignore the fact that the leadership of the contras is probably as repugnant to ordinary Nicaraguans as the leadership of the Bay of Pigs force was to the ordinary Cuban 25 years ago. That the contras are led

by key officers of the old Somoza dictatorship's National Guard, the main oppressors of the population in the old days, is either sheer C.I.A. folly or a confession that no better leaders could be produced.

The Administration confronts this argument by pointing out that respected democrats from the first Sandinista regime, including Arturo Cruz and Alfonso Robelo, are members of the umbrella political organization attached to the contras, and that this in turn suggests the existence of widespread support inside Nicaragua for the anti-Sandinista effort.

Here again the Cuban experience is instructive. The C.I.A.-backed Democratic Revolutionary Front was headed by José Miró Cardona, the first Prime Minister after the Cuban revolution, and included Manuel Ray, who had been Mr. Castro's liberal-minded public works minister. But despite their individual popularity, and the fact that they had been dismissed by an increasingly radical Fidel Castro, they did not have significant backing inside Cuba, and when the invasion came, the C.I.A.-controlled Democratic Revolutionary Front turned out to be totally useless.

Just as the C.I.A. misled the Kennedy Administration about the internal support for the exiles' invasion, the Reagan Administration — equally misleadingly — applies self-fulfilling prophecies to the Nicaraguan dispute. The President says he is willing to forget the contras if Managua agrees to negotiate, but what he evidently means by negotiation is either a Sandinista capitulation or power-sharing with the contra-backed opposition outside the country.

Since, as President Reagan must realize, this is an unacceptable proposition to any government, he will be able to proclaim that, having turned down his peacemaking ultimatum, Nicaragua is now fair game for the use of force. And at that juncture he will have trapped himself.

Recent history shows that the United States can impose its will in Latin America only by applying or threatening the use of its armed forces. The leftist regime in Guatemala was thrown out in 1954 by a rag-tag guerrilla army directed by United States officers, ushering in a corrupt rightist dictatorship. In 1965, it took two United States combat divisions to make the civil war in the Dominican Republic come out our way. In 1983, tiny Grenada was simply knocked out by American forces.

What happens, therefore, in Nicaragua if the contras, even with a fresh \$100 million, fail to win their war? Will President Reagan, in desperation, order the use of American troops there? This is the one thing that John F. Kennedy chose not to do at the Bay of Pigs. □